

Talking trash: Saving money via zero-waste lunches

Though the school year is over, Zea Luce is still thinking about school lunches — zero-waste lunches, in particular.

“We’re targeting items in the lunches that are not reusable, recyclable, or compostable,” said Luce, environmental outreach coordinator for GreenWaste of Palo Alto.

“All of the food, napkins, milk containers and cardboard trays, we can compost. Juice boxes, Capri Sun pouches and other ‘tetra paks’ are not recyclable. That’s why we are talking up zero-waste lunches, using a thermos to carry juice poured from a larger container instead of a box or a pouch.”

GreenWaste of Palo Alto is a private company and a branch of GreenWaste Recovery, which won a Sustainable Business Award on June 2 from Acterra, an environmental nonprofit group, for its waste-sorting facility in San Jose.

GreenWaste works with Palo Alto on its zero-waste initiative. Luce is one of three



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environmental outreach coordinators whose job is educating the community.

“I go around and talk to the schools, businesses, apartment buildings, restaurants, everybody. We don’t want this to drop off the radar,” she said.

All Palo Alto schools switched over to GreenWaste in spring 2010. The more recycling they do, the less money they pay for trash. The typical elementary school now avoids about \$130 a month in trash costs, and the whole district saves more than \$260,000 a year.

“The PAUSD, the PTA and the district are pushing this really hard,” said Jeffrey Sid, who leads the Green Team at Addison Elementary School, and is the father of two students there.

Many private schools in Palo Alto are also avoiding costs by sorting their trash, particularly St. Elizabeth Seton, Luce said. The Emerson School, Gideon Hausner Day

School, and the International School are also saving money on their monthly trash bills.

“I taught Sister Lolita (Krebsbach)’s class, and they taught everyone else,” Luce said. “They did really great posters for each classroom, and away it went. St. Elizabeth Seton cut their garbage from 9 cubic yards per week to only 3 yards per week, and added 8 yards of compost per week and a 3-yard recycle bin. The school has really embraced the new system and is doing a fabulous job.”

The Green Teams were formed at the schools to work on various sustainability projects, such as getting students into the habit of composting and recycling. The teams will continue work on waste education, aiming to make it part of school operations.

“It’s one of those things that need to be positively reinforced,” Sid said. “It’s really key to get it going at the beginning of the year, and we have to monitor it periodically.”

School Matters is happy to read your feedback. Please email comments to schoolmatters@paloaltopta.org to reach Preeva Tramiel.